PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL MONUMENTS,

MADRAS PRESIDENCY.

PRESENT CONDITION OF THE AMRAVATI TOPE, APRIL 1882.

REPORT BY

CAPTAIN H. H. COLE, R.E.,

CURATOR OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS IN INDIA.

(Illustrated by a plan and a rough panoramic sketch.)

SIMLA:

GOVERNMENT CENTRAL BRANCH PRESS,

1882.

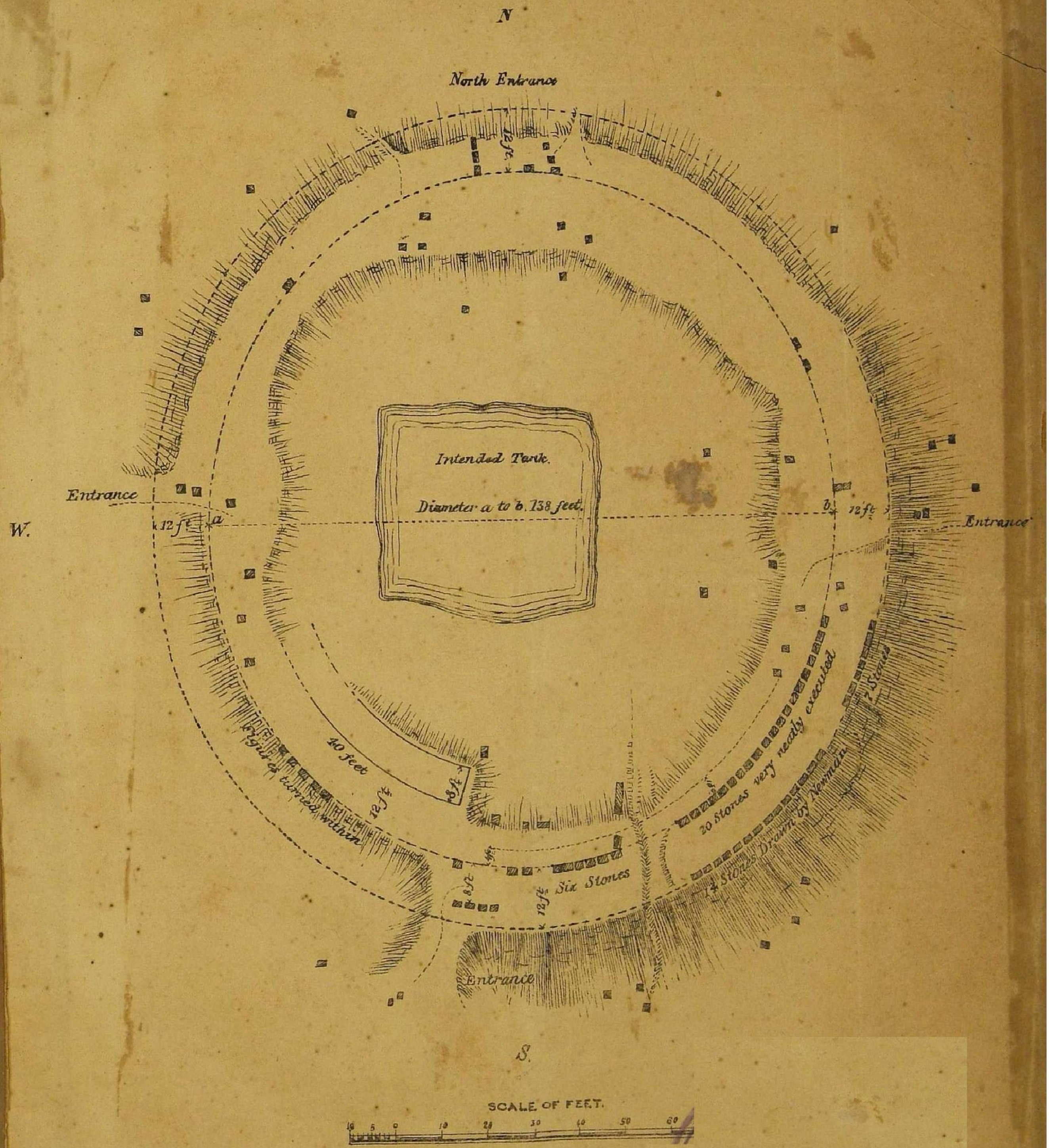
III/47

PLAN OF AMRAVATI

MADE IN 1816

BY

Colonel Mackenzie.



Memorandum on the present condition of the Amravati Tope in Madras.

April 1882.

Dr. Burgess and the Amravati Tope.

Dr. Burgess has recently been to Amravati in the Kistna District and recommended the removal of the Buddhist sculptures to the Madras Museum. The preservation of, or disposal of, these remains is obviously a question appertaining to the subject of "*conservation*" and not to "*archæological research.*"

Letter to Madras Government.

2. Writing to the Madras Government on the 27th March, I alluded as follows to those Buddhist remains :—

"5. As regards the Buddhist remains at Amravati, photographs of which were sent to me under cover of Madras G. O. No. 241, dated 23rd February 1881, I mentioned in my letter No. 52 of 18th June 1881, that I hoped to be able to visit the Kistna District, and to submit a report during the year. Unfortunately my tour this season has been much shortened by examinations for promotion under the Regulations of G. O. No. 130 of 1st October 1880.

"I observe, however, from the various letters addressed by Dr. Burgess to you, copies of which I have had an opportunity of perusing (see G.O.s, 11th January 1882, No. 42, 12th January 1882, No. 45, 19th January 1882, No. 84 and No. 105), that Government has been inclined to adopt the suggestions made by him to remove the sculptures from Amravati to the Madras Museum.

"6. I now understand that the sculptures from Bezwada have already reached the Madras Museum, but that Amravati has not yet been denuded of all its marbles. I hope that no further steps will be taken in respect of any of the Amravati stones until I have visited Amravati and submitted a report on the best means of conserving these Buddhist remains.

"7. I may remark that the late Mr. Adam last year assured me nothing should be done until I had made my recommendations.

"8. I also hope that pursuant to the orders of the Madras Government, No. 187 of 11th February 1881, and letter No. $\frac{1}{8}$ of 12th August 1881 to you, from the Secretary to the Government of India, that I may be informed of any suggestions offered by Dr. Burgess for the restoration or conservation of ancient monuments, and that all schemes may be considered in consultation with me before they are ordered to be carried out."

Letter from the Collector, Kistna District.

3. I now learn from a letter written on the 2nd April last by the Collector of the Kistna District, that Dr. Burgess was engaged at Amravati *over a month* this last cold season, and packed up everything that he considered worth packing, and has in fact *ransacked the place* of all valuable stones.

Removal of some Amravati stones via Bezwada.

4. So much haste has been displayed in getting the Amravati stones removed under Dr. Burgess's auspices, that the collections

previously brought together at Bezwada were transferred by canal at once to Madras.

5. My latest information from the Collector, by telegram dated the 23rd April, informs me that the Amravati marbles have been packed by Dr. Burgess and are now in a shed close to the site, *waiting for the water to rise in the river* (*i.e.*, render their transport to Madras possible).

Telegram from Collector, Kistna District.

6. The question of conserving the Amravati remains was one which I had taken up before Dr. Burgess had been appointed to Madras, and both official and demi-official correspondence had passed between me and the Madras Government on the subject. When, however, Dr. Burgess arrived at Madras his action as regards Amravati received the deliberate sanction of the Madras Government, and it was not until I had personally represented to His Excellency the Governor how contrary this course was to the procedure sanctioned by the Government of India in respect to my office as Curator, that it was admitted that my report and opinion on the subject should have preceded any action.

Conservation at Amravati.

7. When I took up the Amravati case, excavations had been carried out under the orders of the Duke of Buckingham in 1880, and the Secretary of State was informed in March 1881 that "no demolition of the Tope had taken place, and that all that had been done was to remove the earth from the fallen marbles so as to expose them to view." A set of photographs were taken, and the accompanying sketch panorama from some of them shows the condition of the old ruins as revealed by these excavations and *before Dr. Burgess began his packing*.

Duke of Buckingham's excavations at Amravati.

Panoramic sketch.

The picture *now* presented is probably identical, *minus* the most valuable stones, which Dr. Burgess has enveloped with straw ropes and deposited in a shed hard by and near the River Kistna.

8. As explained, I have been unable this season to visit Amravati, and intended postponing my report until I had seen the place, surveyed it, and judged on the spot of all the arguments for and against *preservation in situ*. Under the circumstances described it is evident that the locality is on the brink of losing all its interesting traditions, and that unless some *energetic action* is taken by Government it will lose them altogether. How far it may be possible *now* to restore any of the sculptures to their original positions is a question to which I cannot reply until all the facts are investigated; but I have no hesitation in counselling the preservation of the marbles

Recommendations under present circumstances.

(now at the Madras Museum and those lying packed) in a suitable manner on the site *at Amravati.* Even should it prove impossible to replace them as they stood, I recommended the erection of a small building where these carvings would be properly displayed and absolutely safe, and the railing-in of the site of the great Buddhist Tope, securing, as far as possible, all the existing masonry of the building.

Interests of Museums and men of science.

9. To meet the wants of the British Museum in London and Central Museum in Madras, *at both of which places there are already several valuable marbles taken from Amravati*, all the sculptures shown in the accompanying panoramic sketch could be perfectly well represented by means of plaster casts. In this way the interests of all concerned would be upheld.

Ancient monuments for India.

10. If all beautiful and valuable remains are to be ruthlessly torn from their ancient sites, the outlying districts of this country will be rapidly robbed of all their interesting records. I believe, moreover, that the policy of preserving ancient monuments *for India* is a sounder one than carting them away to European Museums.

In situ principle.

11. It is generally agreed that monuments are most interesting *in situ*, and the inaccessibility of Amravati (now used as an argument against the "*in situ*" principle) will probably cease in course of time.

Sanchi Tope.

The great Sanchi Tope which, together with the Amravati Tope, furnishes the subject of Mr. Fergusson's large volume on Tree and Serpent worship, has escaped two great dangers, *i.e.*, in 1853, when General Cunningham advocated the removal of the fallen gateways to the British Museum, and in 1868, when the Eastern Gate was nearly carried off to Paris.

Fortunately a cast of the latter took the place of the original, leaving the Tope and its sculptured gateways, now being restored, and repaired, to remain intact, and *in situ* for those who visit Sanchi by the new Bhopal State Railway. India is being opened up by communications of every kind. Travellers and savants from all countries visit her ancient cities and her Temples, and it seems to me *a suicidal and indefensible policy to allow the country to be looted of original works of ancient art when there exist the means of making facsimiles scarcely distinguishable from the original !*

India's communications and visitors.

Dr. Burgess's arguments in Madras.

12. Referring to the Amravati marbles, Dr. Burgess writes in a letter to the Madras Government, No. 153 of 16th February

1882, "The Natives call them useless stones."

Opinion of Government of Madras.

13. On the other hand, the Honourable the Governor in Council records in an order, No. 985 of the 20th July 1881, that he is much pleased to hear that such cordial interest in Mr. Sewell's researches has been evinced by natives of various classes.

Dr. Burgess's arguments in Bombay.

14. In the matter of the *in situ* principle, I find, however, that I am able to agree with Dr. Burgess in Bombay, although I cannot do so in Madras. Writing from Edinburgh to the Bombay Government on the 6th April 1881, he makes the following observations relating to the appropriation of the materials of certain old buildings at Ahmedabad :—

"The principal argument for the appropriation appears to be that the valuable materials of such buildings are allowed to disappear gradually by theft, which it appears to be no one's business to report or detect, and therefore it would be better to break up the stones into road metal. But the force of such reasoning is not quite clear. It is surely the duty of every Government officer to protect or report on the necessity of protecting the ancient public buildings in the district in which he is located. Had this been a little better attended to in the past, we should not now have had to regret so many interesting monuments now utterly destroyed.* *

"The excuses for destroying these remains are always the same;—they are desecrated; nobody cares for them. * * The destruction might begin with some that were of little or no interest, but all past experience shows that it would not stop there. * * * *

"The fancy designs in perforated stonework in the tomb and mosques near Batwa, which the Superintending Engineer says are quite worth being preserved for future use, would be of very little interest anywhere else except in their original positions ; and the buildings in which they are, thereby have a claim to protection." * * *

H. H. COLE, *Captain, R. E.*,

Curator of Ancient Monuments in India.

11th May 1882.

G. C. B. Press, Simla.—No. 6 H. D., C. B.—11-5-82.—200.

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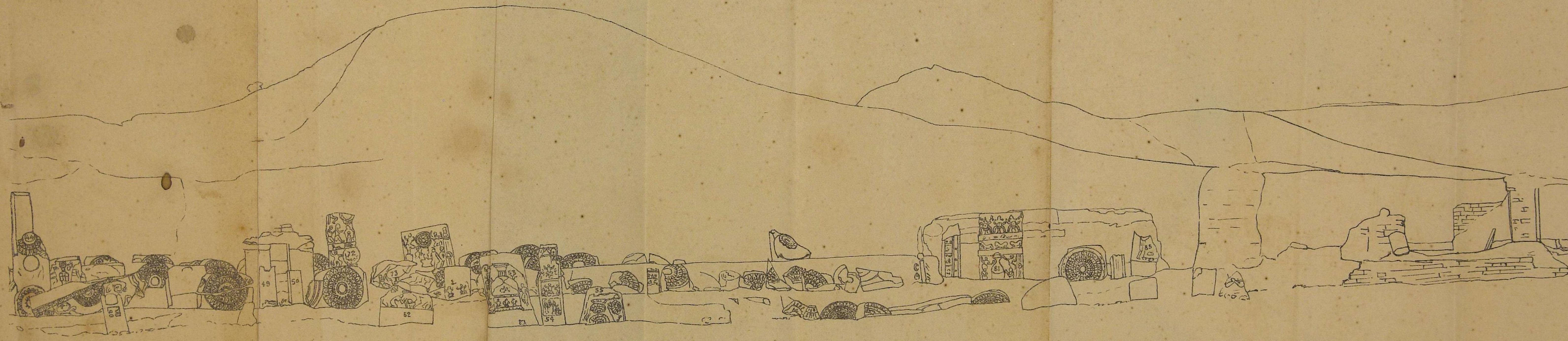

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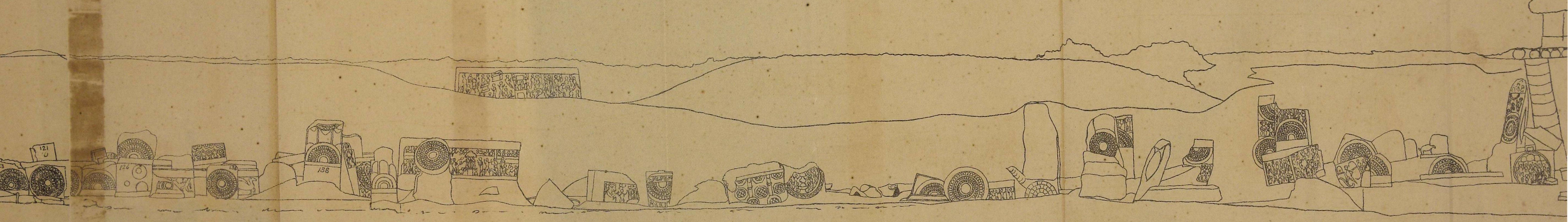

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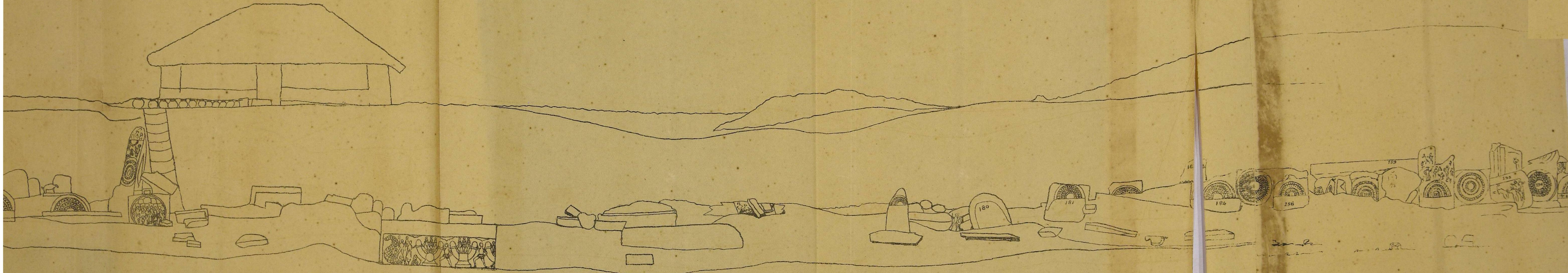

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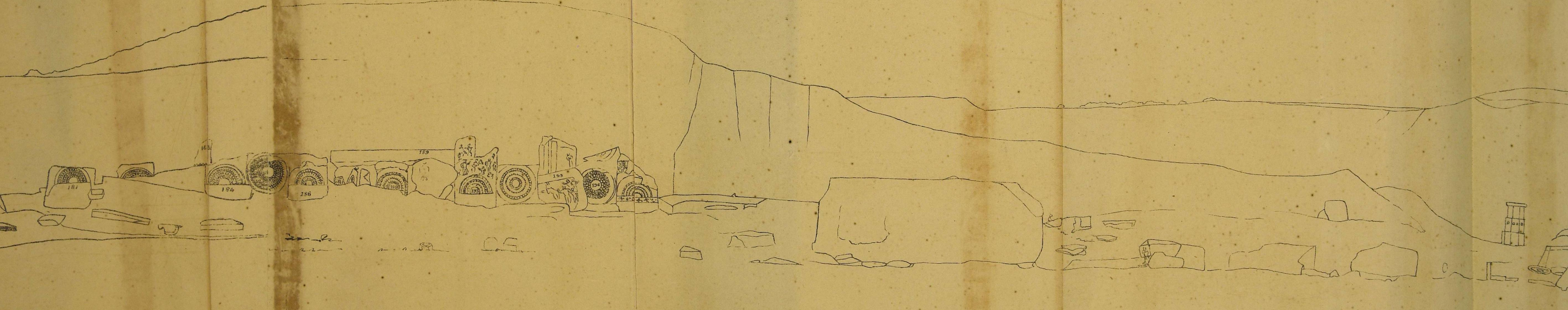

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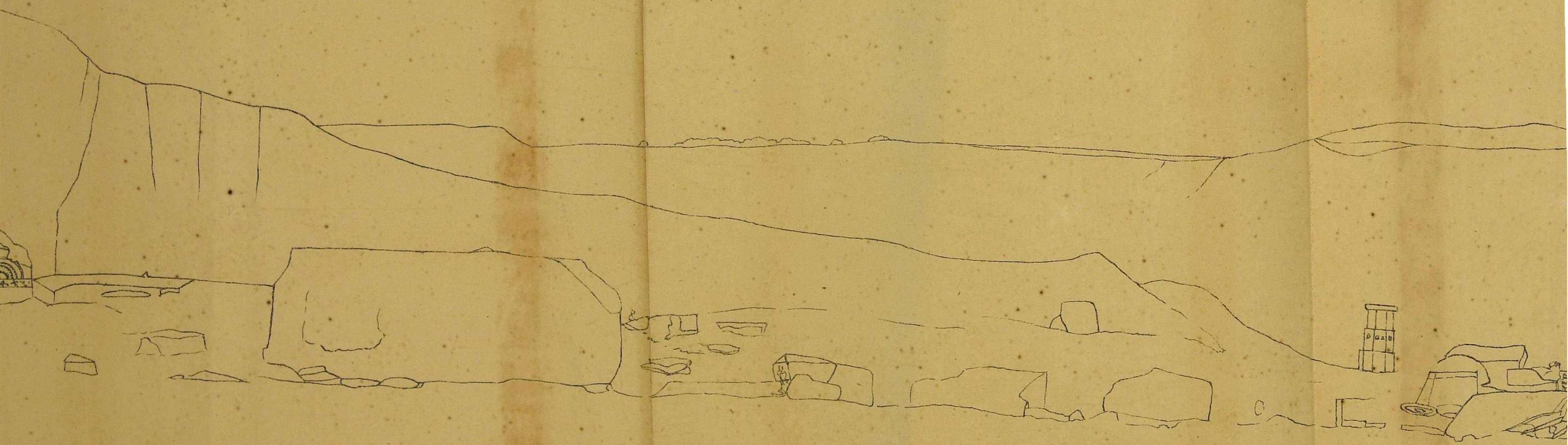

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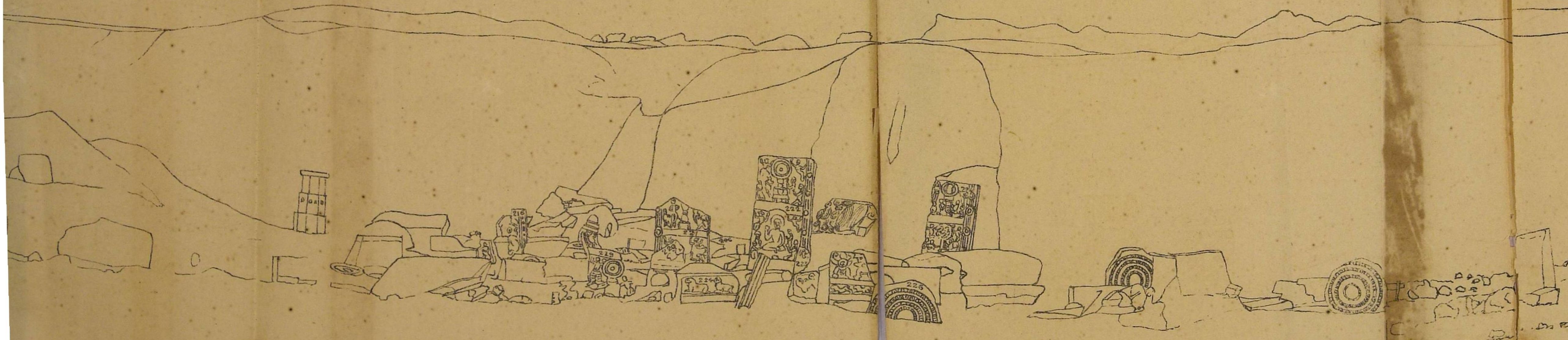

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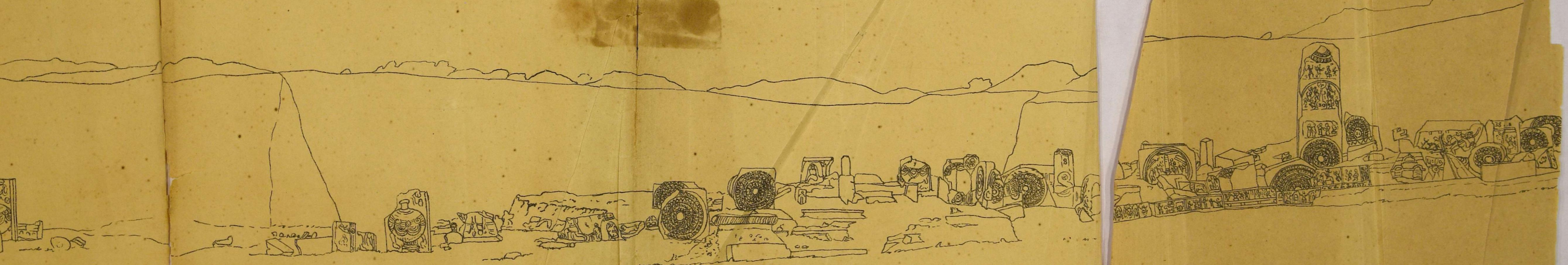
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